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SUBJECT: CAMEROON REACTS TO EUROPEAN UNION STATEMENT ON
CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

¶1. (U) The independent media and many civil society contacts in Cameroon have welcomed the European Union's March 27 statement (see paragraph 4 for text) addressing riots in February and President Paul Biya's stated plans to change the constitution and eliminate term limits. They have also noted a March 28 statement by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs which elaborated on the EU declaration, underscoring the importance of an inclusive debate comprised of diverse elements of Cameroonian society in the discussion of a possible constitutional amendment.

¶2. (U) One local newspaper, while praising the EU and French statements, noted that the U.S. Ambassador was the first to publicly oppose a constitutional amendment (in early February), adding that she went further than the EU by opposing the removal of presidential term limits. The state-controlled newspaper did not publish the European statement.

¶3. (SBU) Comment: While the USG is no longer the lone foreign government to speak out on the constitution issue, we expect the addition of the EU statement is unlikely to affect Biya's intentions to move forward with the constitutional amendment. End comment.

¶4. (U) The European Union Statement text is as follows:

Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the situation in Cameroon.

The European Union is closely watching the discussion concerning the revision of the Constitution, while noting that any changes to the Constitution have to be decided by the people and the institutions of Cameroon. The European Union recalls that the Constitution adopted in 1996 was the outcome of political dialogue and the democratic expression of the will of the people. It emphasizes the importance of the proposals for constitutional revision being subjected to a broad, free and open debate that involves all elements of Cameroonian society. In this context, the European Union remains convinced that the possibility of a changeover of power, the freedom of the press and the guaranteeing of public freedoms are fundamental to the consolidation of democracy, and draws attention to the urgent need to improve the electoral system and the standard of voter turnout, these being guarantors of the stability that the country needs.

The European Union condemns the violence that occurred at the end of February and the attempts at ethnic manipulation that followed. It reiterates its support for Cameroon's economic and social development, with a particular orientation towards the weakest and most disadvantaged sections of the population.
End of Text.

